

**ABSTRACT**

A switching system includes a backplane having slots,  
each including a first set of connectors designed according to  
a common specification. The slots include at least one  
5 extended slot and at least two normal slots, each normal slot  
including the first set of connectors, each extended slot  
including the first set of connectors and an additional second  
set of connectors. The backplane has signal lines to connect  
the connectors of the extended and normal slots to support at  
10 least one data channel between the first set of connectors of  
each of one or more of the at least one extended slot and the  
first set of connectors of each of one or more of the at least  
two normal slots. The backplane also has signal lines to  
connect the connectors of the extended and normal slots to  
15 support at least one data channel between the second set of  
connectors of each of one or more of the at least one extended  
slot and the first set of connectors of each of one or more of  
the at least two normal slots.